

Drawing is another kind of language

Recent American Drawings
from a New York Private
Collection

Exhibition tour:

Pamela Lee
Christine Mehring

with an essay by
Dieter Schwarz

and contributions by
Christian Schneegass
Julie Vicinus

Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums,
Cambridge

12 December 1997 – 22 February 1998

Kunstmuseum Winterthur

4 September – 15 November 1998

Kunst-Museum Ahlen

6 December 1998 – 31 January 1999

Akademie der Künste, Berlin

19 February – 25 April 1999

Fonds régional d'art contemporain de Picardie and Musée de
Picardie, Amiens

21 May – 15 August 1999

Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, New York

3 October – 14 November 1999

MARK SHEINKMAN

Born 1963, New York City; lives and works there

85

Untitled, 1994

graphite on paper
40 x 30 in. (101.6 x 76.2 cm)

Mark Sheinkman's work can be called photographic paintings or painterly photographs. His canvases are coated with a light-sensitive emulsion and then exposed to a moving light source. The developed surface traces the light's movement in the form of lines and scrawls.

Given the hazy abstract configurations on Sheinkman's canvases, we are tempted to see this 1994 drawing, with its blurred gray-and-white grid, as morphologically related to those works. However, we can find a more fundamental affinity, less apparent but more complex and interesting, with respect to their structural logic. Both the drawing and the canvases question and possibly cancel the distinction between line and ground. The light areas on the canvases

set up pockets of shallow space that invite our eyes in to wander around. Those lines, however, are chemically embedded in the canvas surface; as the deepest layer of the work, they are identical with the ground. This paradox, in which spatial illusion coexists with the collapse of line and ground, is central to the drawing as well.

The vertical, regular graphite lines open up an illusionistic space in two ways. Many of them are modeled through the gradation of light and dark, which turns them into round columns. Furthermore, since the gray lines clearly sit on top of the paper ground, a white space opens up behind them. This relationship between line and ground – Walter Benjamin's observation that line determines the surface (see cat. no. 59) – is what we have come to expect in a drawing.

But Sheinkman defies our expectations. His horizontal lines trace the movement of an eraser across and through the graphite

columns. The horizontals vary in width – some as fine as pencil lines, others combining to form larger light areas. These are no graphic lines of the common sort, which sit on the ground. Rather, like the lines embedded in the photographic surfaces, they are the ground. In this they resemble the white negative lines in Frank Stella's *Study for Valle de los Caídos* (see cat. no. 95).

What intrigues us in this drawing is its unresolvable pictorial struggle: the line that is the ground (horizontal erasures) is superimposed on the line that rises above the ground (vertical grays). The horizontals seem to press the verticals down, the verticals to push the horizontals up. Which means the ground is pressing the lines down, the lines pushing the ground up.

Christine Mehring

